

**Feb. 15, 2026**

**St. John's Tappahannock**

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**Matthew 17:1-9**

Today rather than a normal sermon, I am going to share a very well written story by an anonymous author about walking with Jesus and James, John and Peter up Mount Tabor. I apologize that I cannot reference it – I likely have it from a retreat in the last 15 years or so.

I invite you to listen again to the Gospel story from the perspective of being there, on the mountain, to live the story of the Transfiguration of Jesus into the Christ.

Get comfortable in your pew. Settle in. Relax. Or you can let your gaze soften into this room.

Pay attention to your own thoughts and feelings as you listen.....what parts seem important to remember? Where do you become part of the story?

Let's travel now together.....

.....we are at the base of a mountain not far from the Jordan River. Perhaps it is not quite mid-morning – the fullness of the day is still ahead. A hint of coolness lingers from the night before but the rising sun will soon change that.

People have gathered anticipating another sermon, or an inspiring prayer, or better yet, a healing! But Jesus is frustrated. No one, not even his disciples, seems to get it! He knows the political and religious storm clouds that are gathering. He has told his disciples what will come to pass, that he, Jesus, their teacher, the Son of God, will die. How can he prepare them for what they will each be called on to do? Time is running out.

*Jesus says, "Peter, James, and John, Follow Me." Why those three, the other disciples ask themselves and each other. Why me, Peter, James, and John, ask themselves. But there is no time to dwell in that place of fear, doubt, or wanting to be (or not to be) among those chosen this day – Jesus is already walking up the mountain. They follow. Those at the base of the mountain, follow in their hearts, watching, waiting, wondering...*

It is not an easy climb on a cool morning. And it is longer than it looks, a mountain that rises out of the surrounding dry land and stretches out as much as up. On this day, as the sun rises higher, it is getting downright hot. The disciples are feeling the heat, tasting the dry dirt in their mouths; the sizzle of the desert fills their ears; sweat drips into their eyes. The woody, earthy scent of almond and olive trees, and the pungent smell of late summer grasses, mix with the odor of their own bodies. Their breathing becomes more deliberate as the path gets steeper. They dare not stop to rest, to take a sip of the warm water in their camel skin pouches, or to talk. Occasionally they look at each other, their eyes asking questions, offering encouragement. When the path bends a bit, they steal a glimpse of the people below, now like a mirage in the midday heat. The Sea of Galilee glistens below to the south; the Mediterranean Sea is large and wide to the west. The summit is still a long way off.

Jesus is always several paces ahead of them, not looking back .....and they press on.

Finally, sometime later that day, perhaps into the evening - we are not sure and afterwards they will not recall either - they reach the rocky summit. Jesus has stopped and appears to be in prayer. Peter, James and John sit silently under an ancient tree, to wait as they have done so many times before. Jesus will let them know what is needed and when. They allow themselves several swallows of water, relax, and fall into a sleep that is not really sleep ...

Suddenly, they are jolted awake...later they will not be able to say whether it was the blinding light or the hum of the shimmering air that woke them...and they will never be sure how long they had been asleep ... a minute, an hour, a day or a lifetime ...or if they had ever been asleep ...perhaps they are dead and this is heaven...but they are suddenly awake, and very much alive. Jesus is still on the pinnacle but now surrounded by a blaze of light ...no, wait, the light is IN him....HE is blazing white.....so much so that his form, his very body seems to be transparent...And...look, there are others with him...two others...not of this time yet of this place...could it be...no...yes...it could only be...Moses, The Law and...and...Elijah, The Prophet... impossible...how can this be...

And then, as abruptly as they were wakened from their reverie, the light is gone, and Jesus is standing - alone. The same and yet changed. Or perhaps it is less

changed and more known in his fullness. Transfigured. Revealed as human and as divine.

Peter jumps into action, wanting to find a way to preserve the moment, and declares that three monuments should be built on that spot. John now knows in his bones what it is Jesus has asked of him. James, the youngest, in his innocence, is simply filled with awe. Jesus is looking at each of them as if asking.... Do you know *now* who I am? Do you understand *now* why I must die? Do you know *now* the Light that you carry in your own heart? Do you know *now* what must be done? [PAUSE] Do you know how much I love you?

But it is not over, this surreal yet VERY REAL, experience. There is more.

A light filled cloud settles over *them*...and a voice... like thunder rolling, rumbling up from the earth, rising out of their core... *This is My Son...Listen to Him!* The words are more felt than heard.

They are being spoken by....GOD and enveloped in His Light.

Then, it is all over.

Yet now, now they know. Any doubt has been burned away.

All of their thoughts are silenced. They turn to Jesus and are filled with reverence, wonder, awe and the kind of fear that is spoken about in Proverbs and the Psalms, fear, or is it respect, that is the beginning of wisdom, and "knowledge of the Holy One" ( Prov 9:10 ; 1:7 ; Psalm 111:10 ). Jesus returns their gaze with love, determination, and a hint of sadness. There is a burning in their hearts and a brightness in their eyes that they cannot see in themselves but can see mirrored in Jesus and in each other.

Jesus repeats his earlier words, spoken to all of his disciples the day before...*Do not speak of this until after my death*... Then, Jesus starts back down the mountain, the disciples follow, looking alternately at each other, at the dust kicked up by Jesus's worn sandals, and at the crowd of people who are waiting at the base of the mountain. No one looks back. It must have been a long way because they do not arrive until the next morning as the sun is rising...

*I invite you to open your eyes, to come back into the present time).*

How did you hear this story today?

Did you walk with one of the disciples? Did you walk with Jesus? Were you waiting at the bottom of the mountain? Were you standing in that Light with Jesus or in the Cloud? Were you talking with Moses or Elijah? Did God speak to you?

Many people go on nature based spiritual quests – sometimes it is called “going to the mountain.” They go to listen to the natural world, to the still, small voice that speaks out of the silence, to recalibrate their lives with the rising and setting of the sun, the cycles of the months and years, and to see the beauty and potential of who they are in this lifetime. The goal is not to stay in that place of solitude and bliss but to return with renewed passion and focus for their life.

Many people are seeking direction in some aspect of their life. They want a more inspiring job or a better relationship or specific healing from emotional trauma or physical illness. Many are searching for meaning, purpose, and spiritual connection. They want a vision. Some people do have visions on these quests and I have heard that some people return with a specific task, a job to do.

However, what they are more likely to experience is a new way of *being*. It is more about who they are - than what they do. If they come back the same on the inside, nothing is likely to change or the change is not likely to last. If they come back rearranged, renewed, remembered – transfigured - from the inside out, they are more likely to be the person who can embody the change they want to see in their own lives and in the world.

Today we are inspired by the Transfiguration mountain top vision that inspired John, James and Peter. It is in the three synoptic gospels – Matthew, Mark and Luke. This is the power of story, right? 2000 years later we can still be inspired by it.

We do not have to wait for the next time we venture into the wilderness to open ourselves to an awe inspiring moment. Once when I lived in the Asheville region of Western NC, I was driving on 40 west and all of a sudden, in front of me was a glorious mountain with a cloud settling atop, lit up by the late afternoon sun, which was bursting through an otherwise gray vista. I have driven this way before, I have seen this awesome mountain view, but today the scene was like when Dorothy and Toto get to Oz and everything went from somber gray to bursting

with color. It was like a heightened reality of an everyday scene that just made me feel grateful to be alive, to put aside any trivial things that were plaguing me, and to want to live more fully. And I got the feeling that I might miss a lot of these gifts of God's glory, because I simply am overly focused most of the time on work, or family, or whatever, but missing the inspiration available to me because I am simply not awake and alive to these gifts that are happening all over, all the time...visions that make us feel deeply connected to the divine, and in fact, a precious part of it. When we come home to ourselves, when we just turn towards the light from our otherwise overwhelming preoccupations, we are empowered.

The transfiguration story is a story of light. Everything carries a spark of light from that initial bursting forth of creation, and our job is to recognize that light within ourselves and use it in our lifetime to repair the world. This Light speaks not only to our own birth from light, it tells us that we are all carriers of that light, each a part of the living story of the Transfiguration of Jesus into the Christ.

In closing, I quote from William Wordsworth – (another image of Light that reminds us not only of who we are, but whose we are).

From *Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*.

*Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:  
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,  
Hath had elsewhere its setting,  
And cometh from afar:  
Not in entire forgetfulness,  
And not in utter nakedness,  
But trailing clouds of glory do we come  
From God who is our home.*

*Amen*